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# THE RÔLE OF AUSTRIA IN EUROPEAN POLICY.

BY DEMETRIUS C. BOULGER.

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THE retirement of Count Goluchowski from the post of Minister of Foreign Affairs in Austria, which he had held for nearly twelve years, may mark the beginning of a new epoch in the policy of that Empire. I intend no disrespect for the sentiment of Hungarians in omitting the name of their country from the title of this article. Moreover, in that great and interesting state, whose name ever reminds us that it was the eastern bulwark against the barbarians, national must play a subordinate part to dynastic policy, although the latter has necessarily to be moulded and modified by the law of state safety. The policy of the peoples of the most conglomerate country in Europe has been and must continue to be mainly the policy of the House of Hapsburg. What that policy is, and what are the means available to enforce it, do not seem to have entered sufficiently into the calculations, based exclusively on national aspirations and grievances, of those writers with whom the coming disintegration of Austria-Hungary is the favorite bogey. The present is not an inappropriate time for placing before the reader some views very different from those generally expressed by persons who are too fond of pronouncing a requiem over the dominion of the hereditary representatives of Charlemagne. It is, indeed, none too soon to correct the hastily formed opinions which represent that Austria has become an expiring entity and influence, at the very moment when the key to the European situation is to be found in Vienna, and when Austria will probably exercise the deciding vote in the next European *bouleversement*.

Forty years have now elapsed since Austria, attacked on two sides, resigned, after a brief but not inglorious struggle, the first

place in Germany to her old rival Prussia. The question whether that resignation was final and beyond reconsideration has lost none of its interest because it has remained in abeyance for over a generation. In referring to the epoch that is now closing, it is sufficient to record the fact that the blow to Austria's premier-ship was due to the grave error of Napoleon III, who, by philandering with impossible schemes of aggrandizement in the Netherlands, made himself the tool of Prussian policy, of which he was himself marked out to be the next victim. Some writers have said that Austria repeated in 1870 the French blunder of 1866; but Austria's hands were tied by the military conventions Prussia concluded in 1868 with the South German States, who engaged to support their old enemy. To have entered upon a war with them, her ancient allies, her undoubted sympathizers not less now than then, would have been fratricidal on the part of Austria. She had no choice but to stand aloof, to feign, if she did not feel, sympathy with her recent conqueror, and to accept for a time all the consequences of Prussia's double triumph. Among those consequences not the most agreeable was a fixed subordinate place in the political partnership, known as the Triple Alliance, with the two states that had despoiled her.

During this long period of self-effacement Austria has been ruled by a monarch who is endowed with the qualities that grace adversity, and lend to misfortune the redeeming touch of dignity. The most suspicious chief of the Berlin Foreign Office would never have imputed to the Emperor Francis Joseph any ambitious counter-scheming, or sinister longing to redress the hitherto unequal balance of fortune; nor could any likely successor to Kaunitz or Beust be detected among the Directors of the Ministerium on the Ballhaus platz, who might be classed under the uniform designation of "men of buckram." They may be supposed to have taken to heart Count Beust's phrase after Sedan, "*Il n'y a plus d'Europe*," and made it their motto. It may be admitted that no other policy save that of temporizing and waiting on events would have been prudent, or even possible, for Austria after the overthrow of France in 1870. To have attempted the adventurous policy of competing with Prussia on the old lines would only have been to play the game of Russia and to facilitate the attainment of the Pan-German programme. Austrian opposition to Prussia would also have kept Italy firmly

attached to the northern Power, which would have purchased her allegiance by concessions in the Trentino and on the Adriatic. Austria's policy during these last thirty-six years, whether by some instinctive astuteness or happy accident, has thus been the best that could possibly have been followed, while Time has been fighting her battle in a manner that no one yet seems to perceive.

The course of events has freed Austria from all apprehension on the side of Russia, whilst at the same time Hungary has shaken off that antipathy (not unmixed with horror born of the events of 1849) to the Russians which was the uppermost passion of the nation. The Prussian sympathies of the Magyars, which were much talked about and somewhat paraded in the time of Julius Andrassy, have also vanished. In their place has sprung up an anti-German feeling, beside which the old hatred of Russia seems insignificant. Skilfully utilized, that sentiment may yet save the Hapsburg dynasty, as it did in the time of Maria Theresa, and avert the Prussianizing of Austria already predicted by the Pan-Germans.

But the change on the western frontier has not been less remarkable than on the eastern. For some years past Italy has been reverting to the natural union with France, and moving away more rapidly than could have been anticipated from the artificial arrangement with North and South Germany. Of course, the most apparent indication of this tendency is the so-called feud with Austria about the Trentino, and certainly Berlin journalists do not neglect any opportunity of magnifying this trouble; but the most obvious is not always the most important; and cabinets sometimes shape their course by other agencies than those of popular passion. What has to be noted is that Italy is being alienated from Prussia. In any trial of strength between Hapsburg and Hohenzollern, there would be no probability of Italy's joining Prussia as she did on the last memorable occasion. Berlin could not offer the old bribes, or at least only in diminished form, while Italian statesmen cannot but reflect that a Pan-Germania planted on the Adriatic would aggravate the existing situation, and double-lock a door which is at present only partially closed. They may well exclaim, when closer bonds are proposed with Prussia, "*Timeo Danaos et dona ferentes.*" Leaving aside Austro-Italian controversies, which are not very serious, and which are treated with calmness by their respective

statesmen, the fact remains that Austria, freed from anxiety on the east, has no reason to anticipate attack from the west whenever she may decide to make her effort to assert the complete independence of her policy, which has for so long been the mere reflection of that devised at and dictated from Berlin.

The moment for making this manifestation cannot be far distant. Austria, freed of the Netherlands and the Italian duchies, has no cause of quarrel with France. The Triple Alliance was to give her security against Russia, and in her confiding trust Austria believed that it did give her security under every circumstance, until Bismarck startled her with the revelation of his Insurance Treaty with Russia. The course of events has now rendered any guarantee of security against Russia no longer necessary. Hence it follows that Austria derives no more advantage than Italy out of the Triple Alliance. It might be objected that the Germans of central Europe may yet have to combine against future dangers from various quarters, but then Austria is not exclusively German. The shouldering up of the Germans in the Dual Monarchy means the shouldering out of the non-Germans, and the voluntary abdication of Austria's separate and legitimate policy follows as a matter of course. As the House of Hapsburg is very far from being *in extremis*, and is indeed likely to display an unsuspected staying power, it is clear that Austrian policy can never be exclusively and rigidly German, according to those who dream in the couplets of "*Was ist das Deutsche Vaterland?*" The scares created at Berlin have failed to widen the breach between Austria and Italy; the demonstrations of a few students and irredentists have not prevented the statesmen of the two countries from realizing that the *status quo* has great advantages for both, and that it would be folly to create complications in the Balkan peninsula or elsewhere. Italy has practically recovered her freedom of action, and there is little doubt that very shortly Austria will show that she holds the same view about herself. She will resent being any longer a shadow or a satellite; the "men of buckram," who were very useful for a mere show during a period of *recueillement*, will be superseded by men of action who can look to all points of the horizon, and guide the bark of state into what may be termed the main current of European policy and sentiment. When they seek to do this, they cannot avoid being struck by the resemblance between the Euro-

pean situation of to-day and that in 1756 on the eve of the Seven Years' War. There is, of course, one material difference. The resources of England are no longer available for Prussia.

If the time is not far off for a revision and recasting of Austria's external policy, the present moment is not a whit too soon to ask for the display of calmer judgment and more reticence on the part of outside observers in discussing the internal affairs of the Dual Empire. The Hungarians are a brave, emotional people, who are not to be governed by the methods that Berlin applies to the Herreros; but their political sagacity in detecting that now or never is the time to make a stand against the irruption of Pan-Germanism south of the Erz-Gebirge will no longer be seriously disputed. While some people within the Austrian dominions have been saying that the Hungarian demand for the use of their language in the army is treasonable—and it is most instructive to watch how the press of Berlin and the papers of Vienna subsidized by Berlin descanted on that theme, until their readers must have grown weary and pined for novelty—a great many more people there have perceived that Hungary is giving Austria a political lesson of the very deepest significance, and one, moreover, which she is already taking to heart. What is that lesson? It is that a rigidly German policy on the lines laid down at Berlin is not a policy that Austria can or must long pursue. Hungary is telling her elder sister, in no uncertain terms, that the time has arrived when this misfitting garment should be laid aside. A worthy and wise Austrian policy should never be shaped on models supplied from Berlin, and Austrians and Hungarians are not likely to fly at each other's throats because the gentle Germans suggest that dragonades are the remedy for what they are pleased to call Hungarian "disaffection." This disaffection is nothing more than the first open manifestation of the growing resentment at the patronage that Prussia and the Hohenzollerns have long extended over Austria and the Hapsburgs.

But, it may be asked, what about the terrible agitation and commotion going on in Hungary, as described by so many correspondents at Vienna and Buda - Pesth? Scarcely a newspaper exists that does not put this problem constantly before its readers. Is not a fratricidal struggle imminent in Hungary, and will not the long-anticipated disruption of the Dual Empire follow on

“the disappearance of the Emperor Francis Joseph”? The question is not merely asked; it is answered in the same breath with an unqualified affirmative. These commentators omit to take into their reckoning the undeniable fact that what is called by some the excessive loyalty of the Emperor Francis Joseph to his Prussian partner is one of the chief irritating causes that lie at the root of the recent demonstrations by the Hungarian people, which are in a way the proof of their political intelligence. This being so, it follows that “the disappearance of the Emperor Francis Joseph”—which implies no disparagement of that great and good man, but is used here merely as a quotation from the obtrusive and offensive requiems on the Hapsburg dynasty already referred to—would not entail the serious consequences alleged, provided that his successor adopted the counter-policy of that embodied in the Triple Alliance. The present Emperor is to be regarded as struggling, out of pure loyalty, against any change in Austrian policy. But the fates are inexorable, the hour-glass telling off the period during which Austria was compelled to be tied to the train of her ancient rival has almost run down, and no timidity can avail to keep that Empire much longer under the trammels of German policy, which is antipathetic to so many Austrian interests, and even incompatible with her existence as a Great Power. What Austria has to fear is not the display of vivacity and energy by any of her component races, but the enervating influence and asphyxiating pressure of her false friend on the Spree.

Still, the situation renders it desirable that something should be done to satisfy the Hungarians that no attempt will be made to Germanize their country, and to convince them that the House of Hapsburg still relies on their loyalty as one of the chief props of its power and stability. If this is quickly done, the response will come in the same sure tones as were heard in 1742 to the appeal of Maria Theresa. But the people who describe the Hungarians as unreasonable, and who call them the Irish of the Dual Empire, are asserting that the Emperor can make no further concessions, and that he must now stand firm, which in their minds means the adoption of German methods. If those who hold these opinions were the only mentors of the Hofburg, things beyond the Leitha might be painted in dark colors; but those who declare that the Emperor Francis Joseph has exhausted his

patience or his forbearance towards any of his subjects cannot have read the story of his long and sad life with any care. If he thought them entirely in the wrong, his correction would still be one of paternal gentleness; if reflection has made him see that they are not wholly wrong, because the deeper cause of a disturbed national instinct lies at the root of what might at first be deemed trivial grievances, then we may be sure that the concession will be proportionate with the chastened judgment of a large-souled man.

Austria's need for the moment is not merely a new policy but new men. The talents that are useful for a period of inaction, when to "mark time" is the wisest course, are not those that will achieve success when important decisions have to be made, and fortitude and the courage that takes one's fate in both hands are the qualities needed. The Emperor Francis Joseph is showing, by his acceptance of Count Goluchowski's resignation, that he feels the need of new advisers, chiefly because of the deep-rooted repugnance in one part of his dominions to the foreign policy of the Empire. If a different turn were given to that policy, it is almost certain that many current apprehensions would be allayed, and that alone would entail a diminution in the agitation and excitement of which so much is being said and written. The pure Austrians have for years had little or nothing to do with the higher direction of affairs, which have been left mainly in the hands of Poles, Czechs and Slavs. The Hungarians also have not had their due share in the direction of the Imperial policy in external affairs. Yet there are good reasons for thinking that the Kaunitz of the twentieth century will spring from their ranks.

Before the inspired statesman who will nationalize Austrian policy and purge it of its spurious Teutonism is likely to reveal himself, the work for which he is wanted must become more or less defined and apparent. What is needed in Austria is some rallying-cry to which all its federated nationalities will respond. This will arise when some common peril that can only be met by closer union and a serried front presents itself. The first step in the right direction, however, will have been taken when something has been done to satisfy the Hungarians that no attempt is being or will be made to Germanize them. Even with regard to the language question in the army, some *via media*



might easily be found. Military efficiency must be the main object with Hungarians as with Austrians, but some concessions are quite within the range of practical politics. For instance, the Hungarian regiments could be taught the phrases of command, which are of a very limited number, between twenty and thirty sentences altogether, in German as well as in Hungarian, and allowed to use their own tongue on their own soil. Even then the Austro-Hungarian army would not be the only bilingual force in Europe. The Flemish regiments in Belgium are commanded in their own language and the Walloon in French. However excessive the Hungarian agitation may appear at a distance, it is clear that the ultra-Germanism of some of the Emperor's advisers has led him sometimes to sanction too uncompromising a rejection of Hungarian requests, which might have been granted to a partial extent, and at the same time deprived of half their mischief, if indeed there were anything mischievous in them at all. The unqualified denial of such requests in the first place, followed by minatory articles in the pro-Berlin Vienna press, led many Hungarians to attach sinister importance to the report this summer that the Emperor William was anxious to play at their expense the same part that Russia had played in 1849.

Although Austria has never swerved in her adherence to the Triple Alliance, and the absolute fidelity with which she supported Prussia at Algeiras is still quite fresh in the memory, there have been indications for some time that she was making collateral arrangements of considerable importance on her own account. During the last six or seven years her diplomacy has been most active at St. Petersburg, where an excellent understanding with Russia on all points has been arrived at, and its value has been enormously increased by the fact that it has not been regarded with either suspicion or dislike in Hungary. People have made the Prussian diplomatist, like the Prussian drill-sergeant, a kind of brass god, but they are really both very clumsy persons, and at Buda-Pesth a juster view has been taken of the true value of the Austro-Russian *entente* than has prevailed at Berlin. The creator of this friendly understanding, which precludes a quarrel in either Poland or the Balkans, was Baron von Aehrenthal, and he is now at the head of Austria's foreign department as Count Goluchowski's successor. He is, therefore, the originator and executant of the first piece of origi-

nal statesmanship in Austria's foreign policy since Count Beust, and it will be very surprising if he does not endeavor to crown his work by further successes in quarters which would readily respond to any Austrian advances. An *entente* with Russia might easily be supplemented by assurances which would satisfy Italy that there is no desire or intention of offering provocation to her somewhat oversensitive feelings. Austria and Italy are partners in an alliance which is nominally pacific and non-aggressive. With England and France there is not the smallest difference to ruffle the temper, or cloud the sky, and cordial friendship may be said either to exist or to be obtainable for the asking. An Austrian statesman who surveys the international situation calmly and without prejudice will see in all these circumstances ground for confidence and even complacency. The day when Austria might have been coerced into doing what she did not wish and ought not to do has passed by. If her statesmen realize the significance of what is happening in Europe and show themselves equal to their task, they will before long make their country respected by all, while they will have the satisfaction of seeing it menaced by none, because they will have ranged themselves on the side of Europe, which the triumph of Prussia in 1866 and 1870 effaced, as Count Beust said, but fortunately only for a generation.

The rôle of Austria in Europe should be a moderating one; but as long as her political action was known to depend solely on the wishes of Berlin, it was, quite unintentionally, we may admit, but still none the less positively, an inflammatory influence, for the Prussian Government, while it felt sure of Austrian cooperation, has often thought of defying the rest of Europe and trying to establish its hegemony down to the English Channel. Many North Germans, indeed, consider that Prussian policy has committed its most serious blunder in allowing the favorable moment for confirming the 1870 triumph to pass away unutilized. Although only a few months have elapsed since Algeciras, which marked the apogee in the friendly relations between Austria and Prussia, the confidence felt at Berlin as to the absolute subserviency of Austria to its wishes and orders is shaken, and the appointment of Baron von Aehrenthal will further diminish it. It is beginning to be realized there that Austrian devotion and self-sacrifice was a personal offering on the altar of blighted

hopes and harsh experience by the Emperor Francis Joseph, and not the full and unchanging surrender of their interests and ideals by the Austro-Hungarian peoples to their old antagonist. The next phase in the evolution of Austrian policy *vis à vis* to its powerful neighbor will be when Berlin finds itself compelled to listen to counsels of moderation from Vienna.

And thus there will be a fresh exemplification, in the very heart of old Europe, of the truth of the aphorism that the whirligig of time brings its own revenges. The Austria that was trampled on forty years ago, and that has played ever since a timid and retiring part in the great game of world politics, is once more coming to the front. It will, perhaps, not be very long before Vienna is again as conspicuous a centre of European diplomacy as it was in the days of Metternich. The objects of its statesmen will long continue to be pacific, because their country has need of consolidation; but they would be more than human if, remembering all the past, they did not feel a peculiar satisfaction in the knowledge that the course of events had placed in their hands the means of curbing the arrogance of Prussia.

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